

Masterpieces on U.S. Stamps: The Works of Winslow Homer

"The life I have chosen gives me my full hours of enjoyment for the balance of my life. The Sun will not rise, or set, without my notice, and thanks." - Winslow Homer

Born on February 24, 1836 in Boston, Massachusetts, Winslow Homer was one of the most well known artists to come out of the Civil War. Winslow became the apprentice to a local lithographer by age 19. In 1859 he moved to New York City to study at the National Academy of Design. While there he supported himself by contributing drawings to *Harper's Weekly*. In 1861 *Harper's* sent him to Washington to sketch Abraham Lincoln's inauguration.



The following year he was dispatched during the war as a "special artist" to cover the Peninsula Campaign. That was Homer's only time serving as a "special" yet he still made frequent excursions to the battlefronts. He filled his sketchbook with drawings, which he later worked from while back in his New York studio. Double-page woodcuts of his war-time illustrations were featured in *Harper's* throughout the war years.

This painting, *Home Sweet Home*, was exhibited in New York in 1863, where it was admired and quickly sold. The title refers to the song frequently played by the Union regimental. A tune that stirred up feelings of homesickness and longing in the infantry men who listened to it. Homer's use of the title also referred to the soldier's present "home" on the battlefield. He did the cooking and washing during his time on the front meaning he knew all too well that an enlisted soldier's home was far from "sweet."



Winslow Homer was not a typical "combat artist". His depiction of the war was concerned with the intimate moments of camp life and human interest rather than with the clashing armies. Supplied with his firsthand observations made at the front, he translated these drawings into paintings. In 1865 his painting *Prisoners at the Front*, depicting Brig.



Gen. Francis C. Barlow questioning Confederate captives established his reputation as a painter of note.

After the war Homer shifted his focus, devoting his talents exclusively to genre painting, becoming one of the foremost artists in America. He is famous for his Maine seascapes, woodland scenes in the Adirondacks and, in later years, watercolors of the Bahamas. His domestic travel for the next 15 years included summers in the White Mountains, trips to the Adirondacks, and a visit to Gloucester, Massachusetts in 1873.

The Fog Warning, by Homer depicts the isolation of a



Winslow Homer (1836-1910) 32 USA

fisherman as he battles against the ocean waves and inclement weather. Perhaps the dark sky, clouds and color of the sea suggest that Mother Nature is angered by the taking of the big fish, one of her creatures.

One of Homer's most popular paintings, *Breezing Up* was first exhibited in 1876, during America's centenary celebration. The work was hailed for its freshness and energy. Amid the general climate of optimism and great expectations for the future, some sensed an even larger meaning



in the scene—one writer declared that “the skipper’s young American son, gazing brightly off to the illimitable horizon is a symbol of our country’s quiet valor, hearty cheer, and sublime ignorance of bad luck.”

In 1882, Homer moved from his New York studio to coastal Prout’s Neck, Maine. This would be his home for the rest of his life. He continued traveling, visiting Quebec and the Adirondacks during summer months, and in the winter Florida, Bermuda, and Nassau, Bahamas. He exhibited his work almost annually at the Brooklyn Art Association. He died in Maine on September 29, 1910. He is considered one of the foremost painters in 19th century America and a preeminent figure in American art.



In 1987 Bermuda issued a set of five stamps with paintings by Homer. Among them Bermuda 514 (right), depicts a Homer work, *Bermuda Settlers*. Salt Kettle, above, is reproduced on Bermuda Scott 518.

